



# **GABRIOLA ISLAND VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT**

## **Fire Services Review Project**

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## 1. Executive Summary

Gabriola Island is the most northerly of the southern group of Gulf Islands in the Strait of Georgia. Located approximately five kilometers east of Nanaimo, Gabriola Island is primarily serviced by BC Ferries Corporation and has a main ferry dock on the western side of the island. The Island has a land area of roughly 57 square kilometers with some challenging topography that varies from beaches at sea level to heavily forested hills rising to 160 metres (525 ft) on Stoney Ridge in the centre of the island. Vehicular travel on the Island is primarily via a “ring road” that completes a loop while traversing moderately steep hills and some significant curves, providing primary access and egress for residents from all areas around the island.

Gabriola has a full-time resident population of approximately 4500 citizens, and this number grows significantly during the summer months with tourists and part time residents coming to the Island. Although the Island is located within the Islands Trust system and the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) whereby provisions of the *Islands Trust Act (BC)* and *Local Government Act (BC)* apply, as an Improvement District, Gabriola Island residents are most specifically governed by the elected Gabriola Fire Protection Improvement District (GFPID) Board of Trustees under their “Letters Patent” issued by the Government of British Columbia. The most recent Letters Patent is dated 1995, and confirms the singular and primary Object of the GFPID within Proclamation #3:

*“The objects of the improvement district shall be the provision of fire protection and the acquisition, maintenance, and operation of works, buildings, and equipment for that purpose and all matters incidental thereto.”*

To this end, the Gabriola Island Volunteer Fire Department (GVFD) is established through Bylaws stemming from the Letters Patent and provides the crucial role of fire protection and control for the residents and visitors to the Island. GFPID and GVFD Management have the declared service level of “Full Service” for the GVFD. The department consists of a full time Fire Chief, an Administration / Corporate Officer, and a part-time Training Officer that lead an ideal staffing roster of 40 Officers and firefighters (this number is currently at 38).

In 2022, the GVFD responded to a total of 554 calls for service (this number is recorded as 556 by Surrey Fire Regional Dispatch), the highest recorded call volume over the last 10 years and a 12.8% increase over the previous record high of 491 responses in 2017. By comparison, GVFD responded to 458 calls in 2021 and 352 calls in 2020 (*see Appendix 5, p. 40 for the 10-year summary provided by GVFD Administration*).

Due to high risks inherent when providing protective fire services across British Columbia, all fire departments, whether large or small, career or volunteer, are facing increasingly complex due diligence issues such as statutory regulatory requirements for minimum training standards of structure firefighters and first responder occupational health and safety. This, all while striving to meet expectations from the citizens they serve regarding fire department response capabilities and at the same time, maintaining fiscal responsibility and efficiency.

The GVFD is not unlike many other small-sized volunteer fire departments across British Columbia and indeed, across Canada. A very large amount of time, energy, and dedication is required from the relatively small group of Command and Administrative staff, as well as Operational Officers, to ensure as

best as possible with a limited budget that the day-to-day efficacy of GVFD operations and response capability is being done in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and best practices.

Following the retirement of the former Fire Chief after 30 years of service, new Fire Chief Sprogis has been leading the department since December 2019. Chief Sprogis has over eighteen years of service with GVFD, including seven years as the Training Officer. Working together with current Training Officer Captain Stringer, Chief Sprogis and GVFD were following a long-range plan from 1999 and should be replaced with a new plan once developed with designated GFPID Trustees.

GVFD Command staff, Administration, Training, and Operations Officers are doing many things well and are providing attentive and innovative management to the department, all of which has been accomplished while operating within a total base budget of \$751,880 in 2022. Since becoming head of the department, both Chief Sprogis and his new Administrative Assistant / GFPID Corporate Officer have transitioned into their new roles by incorporating updated methodologies and fostering new relationships within the community. Many proactive and positive initiatives have been undertaken and it is noteworthy that this is being done within the often-difficult environment of change management – previous management of the GVFD was held by a long-term Chief and Administrative staff that utilized different methods and held different relationships within the community. It is jokingly said in the fire services that firefighters loathe two things – “the way things are”, and “change”. Fire Chief Sprogis and his Management staff are to be commended for their proactive efforts as a Leadership team and department, to identify what can continue to work well but also to analyze what could be improved and the opportunities to do so.

As part of this internal analysis, GVFD Management has identified the need to improve and update their overall administrative processes and Records Management Systems (RMS) and are taking steps to do so. This includes not only training and administrative RMS, but also new and updated Operational Guidelines that include an Occupational Health & Safety Program, Critical Incident Stress program, and other workplace aspects covered by provincial legislation and regulation.

Many examples of new initiatives and existing systems that are working well stand out as we complete our review project. Administratively, GVFD Management has secured \$406,000 in Provincial grants over a period of less than three years, to augment low baseline annual budgets. Chief Sprogis implemented a “Day Firefighter” program, by which funds normally paid to outside contractors for various work tasks were re-allocated to fund two firefighters, each working daytime shifts Monday to Friday and being available for tasking on a variety of fire department work. Specifications for new fire apparatus that compliment the 2019 Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS) Superior Tanker Shuttle Accreditation was planned and a new tandem axle, 2000-gallon pumper with pump and roll capability was added to the fleet in 2021.

Many departments faced challenges during the COVID-19 Pandemic, but Chief Sprogis implemented adjustments to the GVFD response matrix by implementing a “Platoon” system, by which risk of exposures amongst firefighters was minimized (GVFD had zero in-house transmissions amongst firefighters and lost no days of operations during the pandemic), but an ancillary benefit of this adjustment was greater clarity of anticipated staffing levels for GVFD responses.

Mutual aid partnerships have been fostered, and a new “Open Door” policy for GFPID Trustees was created to improve collaboration and discussion between fire management and Trustees. Communications and alerts to the community were increased using social media tools, and new local neighbourhood and larger community emergency evacuation planning for wildfires, floods, and other extreme weather events were developed and tested by creating scenarios and drills. In this theme, new partnerships were developed with groups such as the GERTIE bus group and existing advisory relationships were enhanced with the Office of the Fire Commissioner and the BC Wildfire Service.

This planning was tested in real time in the fall and winter of 2022, during periods of extreme wind (November 4<sup>th</sup>), snowfall, and arctic temperatures around southern BC. Additionally, during this time a main communications line of elevated fibre optic cable was severed, leaving the entire Island without cellular or hardline phone capabilities, and cutting the 911 system. GVFD brought in a COW trailer (portable cellular tower on a trailer) to provide temporary replacement of some systems and supported their community during this protracted emergency by upstaffing their main firehall 24/7 to be able to receive requests for help from citizens driving into the firehall.

Our feedback received regarding the GVFD Training Division acknowledges that the Training Officer and Fire Chief are taking training seriously and are doing an admirable job in providing this very important function. Not unlike many small volunteer fire departments across BC, the time and dedication required not only from the Command staff and Officers in leading training initiatives, but also from the firefighters themselves in participating in regular weekly training programs, is substantial and all are to be commended for their commitment and motivation in doing so.

GFPID and GVFD have declared that the GVFD operate at the ‘Full Service’ level, and this is supported by all feedback received during this review project. However, this feedback also identifies the ongoing challenge to maintain adherence to full NFPA standards within existing training and operational requirements identified at the Full-Service level. This is especially true when considering the high benchmarks of the NFPA standards, and the maintenance of various JPR’s (Job Performance Requirements) contained within these standards as they are cyclically updated by NFPA on an ongoing basis.

With assistance from Training Officer Stringer, our discussion and analysis of the Training Division identifies the many statutory demands placed upon this division, particularly within a “part-time” schedule as the Training Officer position is currently funded. Recruitment and training of new firefighters; new and ongoing monthly and annualized training programs; new skills training and ongoing maintenance training for front line firefighters; apparatus driving and pump operation training; and record keeping of all training activities completed for each firefighter are just some examples of these demands.

As mentioned, the GFPID governance model of the GVFD extends through Bylaws stemming from the Letters Patent. Some aspects of these Bylaws appear to conflate the roles and responsibilities of the Authority Having Jurisdiction (the Board of Trustees is the Employer) and the Fire Chief, in that some provisions of the Bylaws clearly outline the independent responsibility of the Fire Chief, but other provisions make those powers subject to permission from the Board of Trustees (the Employer). In our opinion, these aspects intermix the authority and jurisdiction of the respective roles and impose restrictions on the normally statutory role of the Fire Chief.

In the absence of a well-defined reporting structure (Chain of Command) between the GFPID Board and GVFD Management, there is a lack of clarity about who manages which portions of the reporting structure for tasks such as performance management; progressive discipline (and any subsequent appeal process), and the recruitment process. A conflict of actions and opinions between the Fire Chief and the Employer may create real or perceived operational liability as it has the potential to interrupt and/or alter processes put in place to ensure the operational compliancy of the GVFD.

This can best be addressed by the Board by amending GFPID / GVFD Bylaws and implementing an improved and clarified Chain of Command to the GVFD that streamlines and minimizes independent contacts between Board members and various employees.

These efforts and approaches need to be accepted by all GFPID trustees and better supported by the Board collectively as the Employer, in terms of providing additional resourcing (staff, training, and budget) within a more collaborative and supportive work environment.

By streamlining workload and following a clearer and more effective communications model, overall workflows will be improved and will better support the GFPID and GVFD mandate. This mandate is singular in focus and is well identified in proclamation #3 in the GFPID Letters Patent (1995) and should therefore be recognized as the primary directive of any governance model – to keep the community of Gabriola Island as safe as possible from threat of fire.

## **2. GVFD Fire Services Review Project**

### **2.1 Origin & Purpose**

For the purposes of advice, guidance, and training, GVFD Fire Management regularly confers with external fire service oversight agencies and accredited training providers such as Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS); Vancouver Island Emergency Response Academy (VIERA); the Municipal Safety Association (MSA); BC Wildfire Service (BCWS); and the BC Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC). GVFD Management has also used the OFC “Fire Department Inspection and Audit Checklist” to internally measure compliance of various aspects of GVFD operations and administrative systems (see Appendix 2, p. 40 - Fire Department Inspection and Audit Checklist).

To confirm that GVFD internal systems are meeting or exceeding these measures, and with the approval of the Gabriola Island Board of Trustees, Jay W. Brownlee & Associates has been retained to conduct an external, high-level review and analysis of the Gabriola Island Volunteer Fire Department (GVFD) Operations and overall Authority Having Jurisdiction (AHJ) governance of the department (the Fire Services Review Project).

### **2.2 Terms of Reference & Scope of Review**

The Fire Services Review Project Charter (Terms of Reference) was completed in August 2022 and outlines the owner of the Project (Gabriola Island Volunteer Fire Department) and Fire Chief Sprogis as the Project Manager and Approver. The Review Project Team consists of Fire Chief Sprogis; Training Officer Captain Stringer; the Consultant; and an HR Sub-contractor reporting directly to the Consultant.

The Review Project provides a high-level review to analyze and confirm that various aspects of GVFD administration / HR, operations, and training systems operate within statutory compliance and recognized best practices for fire services in BC, including:

- Fire Bylaws, Declared Service Levels, Operational Guidelines, Operations / Training Programs, and RMS Policies governing GVFD.
- Determining that Administrative and HR Policies of GVFD are compliant with applicable laws, standards, and reflect best practices.
- Making recommendations for improvement as needed.

The Project Manager of GVFD (Chief Sprogis) is responsible for all final decisions and for the implementation of any suggested amendments or changes to any framework, policies, or initiatives. Specifically, this report provides policy advice and reports findings from research and analysis to develop and recommend any necessary changes to the GVFD regulatory framework, including policies, programs, and initiatives at the direction of the Fire Chief and will include a review of items listed as “In Scope”, below:

In Scope Items – Phase 1 (Initial review and mid-term report):

1. Improvement District Board of Trustees (Authority Having Jurisdiction) Policies relating to governance and provision of Gabriola Island Volunteer Fire Department services:
  - a) Fire Bylaws
  - b) Declared Service Levels
  - c) OFC Minimum Training Standards (Playbook)
2. GVFD Operational Guidelines
3. GVFD Administration / Human Resources
4. GVFD Operations, Training Programs and RMS

In Scope Items – Phase 2 (Ongoing review, as funding allows, for final report):

5. All Phase 1 items, plus:
6. GVFD Apparatus and Preventative Maintenance Program (PMP)
7. GVFD Facilities
8. GVFD Long-range Strategic planning, including discussion re: Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS) - necessity & feasibility of a review?
9. NextGen 911 (Dispatch Comms & Record Keeping programs)

As outlined in the Review Project Terms of Reference, the timeline for submission of the interim progress report was the end of 2022, and this has been met. However, during the summer months of 2022, there were several direct challenges to the statutory authorities of GFPID and GVFD Fire Control Operational Bylaws, and to the statutory authorities of the Fire Chief. Although this review project was originally intended to be a high-level overview of various aspects of the GVFD governance and operations, these multiple and ongoing challenges have resulted in a large amount of time being allocated to assist GVFD in reviewing these challenges and providing information and authorities with which to address the complaints raised. This has required a shift in focus of scope, in that all of items listed as “In Scope” for the Phase 1 Initial review have been reviewed, but some items listed for the

Phase 2 portion of the Review Project have been revised. Supplementary funding approved by the GFPIID in December 2022 provides for completion of the Review Project (within the revised Scope) and allows work to continue with the incorporation of any recommendations deemed acceptable to the Board and GVFD.

In terms of timeframes, the Review Project Terms of Reference outline the timeline for the Phase 2 ongoing review and final report to be concluded by Spring of 2023. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, I am no longer able to participate in aspects of the Phase 2 portion of the review. Accordingly, I submit this final report summarizing all analysis achieved to date and provide our recommendations for as many “In Scope” items as possible.

### **2.3 Methodology**

Initial review work and virtual meetings were done remotely between August and October, as was access to applicable GVFD files and materials. Relevant correspondence was done by email or virtually as required during this time.

GFPIID Trustees were asked to complete an initial questionnaire, identifying issues they felt were priorities to be addressed as part of the Fire Services Review Project. These issues are addressed throughout this report.

After October 1, review work continued virtually / remotely with the addition of a full day of in-person meetings with the Board of Trustees and available GVFD Officers and staff held at the Albert Reed Memorial Fire Hall on Monday, October 24<sup>th</sup>. The agenda for this day included a plenary session presentation to GFPIID Trustees, GVFD Fire Management, Officers, and firefighters, discussing various authorities governing all fire services in British Columbia; meeting with the GFPIID Board of Trustees; meeting with the Long-Range Planning Group and GVFD Fire Management; meeting with representatives of GVFD Officers Group; and a meeting with representatives of GVFD Firefighters Group.

Several follow up virtual meetings were also held with GVFD Administration as well as current and former GVFD Officer staff that were not available for the in-person meetings on October 24.

Simultaneously, work was done by an HR sub-contractor to analyse not only administrative Policies and Procedures, but also the governance model and associated Bylaws and Policies influencing the working relationship between the Employer (GFPIID Board of Trustees) and GVFD Fire Management and firefighters.

Although under contract with the GVFD and by extension, the GFPIID, we are independent of these authorities and not influenced by ulterior motive nor interest of other parties not included within the Review Project Terms of Reference. The Review has been formulated and completed using subject matter expertise (SME) and is based upon professional judgement using appropriate and sufficient audit evidence with which to form our opinion.

### 3. Issues Identification & Analysis

Gabriola Fire Protection Improvement District (GFPID) Board of Trustees Governance model and Policies relating to regulation and provision of Gabriola Island Volunteer Fire Department services:

#### 3.1 Authority Having Jurisdiction: Fire Services Act (BC); Local Government Act (BC) & Improvement District Authorities

As presented to GVFD Management and GFPID Trustees on October 24<sup>th</sup>, we are not qualified to provide legal advice and always recommend the Authority Having Jurisdiction seek their own independent legal counsel. However, through our analysis we have established that the GFPID Board of Trustees are the local government, or “Authority Having Jurisdiction” for Gabriola Island Improvement District, as it relates to provisions under the *Fire Services Act (BC)*. As well, this governance model is empowered primarily through the flow of the *Local Government Act (BC)*, which contains specific sections for Improvement Districts (Part 17).

#### 3.2 Authority Having Jurisdiction: GFPID Authorities

Further within this model, the GFPID is specifically governed by their Letters Patent issued by the Government of BC, and specifically a single primary Object outlining the “provision of fire protection” for the Island, and “all matters incidental thereto”. From this authority stems Bylaws #95, #97, and #98.

#### 3.3 Other Authorities

It should also be noted that as the Authority Having Jurisdiction, the GFPID is considered to be the Employer, for purposes of authority under aspects of the *BC Human Rights Code*, *BC Labour Code*, *Employment Standards Act (BC)* and the *Workers Compensation Act (BC)*, as they relate to provisions for workers (employees) in the workplace. Accordingly, it is important that GFPID Board members fully understand their fiduciary duties and obligations as local government.

#### 3.4 Corporate Governance & Workflow Processes

Feedback received during our review has identified the need for the Board of Trustees to better support employees under their purview. Our feedback has provided various examples of how this support can best be addressed by the Board and GVFD Management adopting and utilizing an improved and clarified Chain of Command between the parties that streamlines and minimizes independent contacts between Board members and various employees. In addition, the Board should embrace a governance model that empowers their employees and allows them the independence to perform their roles and duties as required. Adjusting these two simple aspects in the Employer / Employee governance model will have a positive impact on employee efficiency as well as providing them with a supportive work environment.

#### Recommendation:

1. *The GFPID Board of Trustees and GVFD Fire Management should develop and adopt an improved and clarified Chain of Command between the Board Chair and the GVFD Fire Chief that provides for a transparent and good faith process supported by streamlined and minimized bidirectional, independent contacts between Board members and GVFD staff.*

### 3.5 Fire Bylaws

Flowing from the Letters Patent for GFPIID, there are three Bylaws providing authorities for GVFD: Bylaws #95, #97, and #98.

Bylaw #95 (Fire Regulations Bylaw - June 2020): Specifically outlines the powers of the Fire Chief beyond the *Fire Services Act (BC)* in providing clear regulations for fire prevention and regulation to the community of Gabriola Island.

During the summer of 2022, a fire hazard rating of “Extreme” was established by BC Wildfire Service. This required the Fire Chief to implement enhanced fire restrictions in the community and revoke existing fire permits, including the revocation of “exemption” or “variance” permits.

This caused considerable argument from some members of the community as well as from the Authority Having Jurisdiction (the Board of Trustees), which had the effect of undermining the authority of the Fire Chief in the performance of their statutory duties. This, in turn, provoked external and internal analysis of what authority the Bylaw provided to the Chief and to the Board when imposing penalties for non-compliance of such orders given by the Fire Chief in the interest of fire and life safety for the residents of Gabriola Island.

#### Recommendations:

2. *Improve clarity of powers of the Fire Chief in GFPIID Bylaws by incorporating some if not all the statements contained in the Part 9 Division 2 sections of the [Local Government Act \(BC\)](#) related to Special Fire Protection powers (Section 303, 1, a-d) into these Bylaws. Improvement Districts do automatically use the statements of Part 9 Div. 2 related to Special Fire Protection powers so as the Object of GFPIID is for the provision of fire protection, we believe that it would be useful and well within GFPIID powers to incorporate this clarifying language.*
3. *Incorporate reference to Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner, as outlined in Sections 6, 7, and 24 of the [Fire Services Act \(BC\)](#). Currently, the LAFC is referenced singularly as being the Fire Chief, and only in provision #10 of Bylaw #98.*
4. *Incorporate reference to specific clauses from the [BC Wildfire Act](#) and associated Regulations regarding burning regulation and restriction.*

Bylaw #97 (Procedure for Meetings and Conduct of Business by the Board of Trustees): no analysis was undertaken on this Bylaw.

Bylaw #98 (Fire Department Establishment and Operation Bylaw – September 2021): Specifically outlines the powers of the Fire Chief beyond the *Fire Services Act (BC)* in providing fire protection, suppression, and control to the community of Gabriola Island. However, this Bylaw appears to conflate the roles and responsibilities of the Authority Having Jurisdiction (the Board of Trustees is the Employer) and the Fire Chief, in that some provisions of the Bylaw clearly outline the independent powers and responsibility of the Fire Chief, but other provisions make those powers subject to the direction, control, ratification, and/or approval of, or with permission from, the Board of Trustees (the Employer). In our opinion, these aspects intermix the authority and jurisdiction of the respective roles, impose restrictions

on the normally statutory role of the Fire Chief, and in turn, potentially puts the Employer into a position of liability due to the optics of having final or ultimate decision about various operational aspects of GVFD.

Recommendations:

5. *As stated in Recommendation #2, improve clarity of powers of the Fire Chief in GFPID Bylaws by incorporating some if not all the statements contained in the Part 9 Division 2 sections of the Local Government Act (BC) related to Special Fire Protection powers (Section 303, 1, a-d) into these Bylaws. Improvement Districts do not automatically use the statements of Part 9 Div. 2 related to Special Fire Protection powers so as the Object of GFPID is for the provision of fire protection, we believe that it would be useful and well within GFPID powers to incorporate this clarifying language.*
6. *As stated in Recommendation #3, incorporate reference to Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner, as outlined in Sections 6, 7, and 24 of the Fire Services Act (BC). Currently, the LAFC is referenced singularly as being the Fire Chief, and only in provision #10 of Bylaw #98.*
7. *Include reference in Bylaw to new "Authorities" section of GVFD Operational Guidelines that links Bylaws and authorities stemming from the BC Human Rights Code, BC Labour Relations Code, Employment Standards Act (BC) and the Workers Compensation Act (BC) to updated GVFD Operational Guidelines as they relate to provisions for workers (employees) in the workplace, where applicable.*
8. *Improve clarity of the authorities of the Fire Chief (as this position reports within the governance model of the Board of Trustees) by implementing language that more clearly delineates these roles and responsibilities and a clear reporting structure within an updated, bi-directional Chain of Command.*
9. *Create and embed a new Organizational Chart into this Bylaw.*
10. *Remove references to hiring responsibilities and disciplinary appeal processes from this Bylaw and instead create new Operational Guidelines that identify clear processes for recruitment, promotional procedure, progressive discipline and termination, and other subjects covered under statutory law. As it currently stands, Bylaw #98 undermines the authority of the Fire Chief, and the process of appeal increases legal liability to the Board. As it relates to this process, we recommend:*
  - *The roles and responsibilities that the Fire Chief and the Authority Having Jurisdiction (the Board of Trustees is the Employer) will play in this process be clarified.*
  - *Identify how the point of escalation is beyond the Fire Chief for employees (either a single member of the Board of Trustees or a 3rd party HR resource).*
  - *The Fire Chief be required to seek Board counsel prior to all terminations instead of the current appeal process and any uncertainty of the decision resolved prior.*
  - *An HR resource should be utilized ahead of all termination decisions to reduce legal liability.*

### **3.6 Declared Service Levels, Corresponding Training Programs & Operational Capabilities (per Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards 2022]**

In October 2022, the Office of the Fire Commissioner released the newly updated Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards (formerly known as the Playbook). This document, and the associated Policy, Procedure, and Annex suite of documents, outline updated and clarified language regarding various obligations of the Authority Having Jurisdiction, including the declaration of service levels, requirements for the corresponding training programs, and the formalization of the “Risk Management” function.

GFPID and GVFD have declared that they operate at the ‘Full Service’ level, and this is supported by all feedback received during this review project. However, all feedback also acknowledges that it is an ongoing challenge to maintain the training and operational requirements for the Full-Service level. It is also important to note that the declaration of ‘Full Service’ and the associated training programs are directly linked to achieving and maintaining the Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS) Superior Tanker Shuttle Accreditation, which is of major benefit to the GVFD and to the community (*see section on Fire Underwriters Survey, p22*).

Here are excerpts from the new Training Standards document:

#### **Important Considerations for Authority Having Jurisdiction (p. 7):**

“The determination and declaration of a service level for a local government fire department is intended to assist in the development of a training program for their structure firefighters.”

#### **BC Structure Firefighters Minimum Training Standards Manual Competency Matrix (p. 8):**

- Determination by the AHJ of the service level appropriate to their community needs is critical and the Training Standards document is based on three general service level categories:

- Exterior Operations Level; Interior Operations Level; or Full-Service Operations Level.

- Ensure the service level is correctly identified and declared in bylaw, policy statement, statute, or contract establishing a fire department’s authority and anticipated capability.

- Ensure a training program to match the declared service level is in place that includes a comprehensive process for recording and retaining training records and at least meets the intent of the OHS Regulations 3.22 to 3.25.

#### **All Levels of Fire Services - Risk Management Function (p.10):**

“The Risk Management function is not an operational role in a fire incident response but must be formally addressed by all fire departments. The individual(s) who fulfil this function is responsible for ensuring that the department has in place Operational Guidelines (OGs), training programs and other oversight processes that ensure safe and effective operations at all fire department involved incidents.”

Recommendations:

11. *Formally identify the service level (Full Service) and incorporate into Bylaw (and reflect in Operational Guideline) that establishes GVFD's authority and anticipated operational capability.*
12. *Ensure GVFD Training Programs reflect the declared service level and are identified in associated Operational Guidelines.*
  
13. *Formally incorporate the Risk Management Function into Bylaw #98 and associated Operational Guidelines.*

## **4. GVFD Administrative Structure, Policies, Procedures, & Operational Guidelines**

GVFD Command and Administration staff are doing an exemplary job of providing attentive, proactive, and innovative management to the department and have implemented many initiatives since taking over leadership of the department. Previous references to the now expired long range Strategic Plan (1999), as well as the Office of the Fire Commissioner "Fire Department Inspection and Audit" checklist, have been incorporated into ongoing efforts to continue what is working well, while being willing to reflect on what can be improved in the effort to develop a long new range strategic plan with which to move forward.

### **4.1 Fire Chief**

It should be noted that very large amount of time, energy, and dedication is required from the relatively small group of Command and Administrative staff, to ensure oversight of the day-to-day efficacy of GVFD administration, operations, training, and response capability is being done acceptably and in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and best practices. Often, some of these responsibilities are delegated to Officers to increase Span of Control and assist with workload.

However, as a representative of the GFPID authority, the Fire Chief is essentially alone in the role of Exempt Management of GVFD. Typically, a fire department should always have a 2<sup>nd</sup> In Command (2IC) so that the statutory responsibilities of the Fire Chief can be delegated when the Chief is away or otherwise unavailable. As well, an additional Exempt staff position would increase administrative capacity and help the Fire Chief manage the considerable and statutory workload placed upon this position.

Without an additional Exempt Deputy Chief's position, the GFPID and GVFD are accepting that more and more responsibilities and workload will continue to be downloaded to Operational Officers. This, in turn, may have a negative effect on recruitment and/or retention of these senior officers and therefore an overall negative effect on the retention of these experienced personnel.

Recommendations:

14. *Establish and follow a clear, bi-directional, and well supported reporting structure (Chain of Command) between GFPID Board Chair and GVFD Fire Chief.*

*15. Create and fund an additional GVFD Command staff position of Deputy Fire Chief.*

#### **4.2 GFPID Corporate Officer / GVFD Administrative Assistant**

Due to the significant importance of the role of Administrative Assistant / Corporate Officer and the duality within GFPID and GVFD, we are separately referencing the need to better support this role and more clearly outline the reporting structure and Chain of Command to improve the efficacy and efficiency of this position.

This role has two titles and reports to two separate entities:

Corporate Officer: As outlined in Bylaw #97, the person who is assigned the responsibility of corporate administration under Sec. 738.2 of the *Local Government Act (BC)* and reports directly to the Board of Trustees through the Chair.

Administrative Assistant: As outlined in GVFD Organization Chart, the person who is assigned the responsibility of administrative duties for GVFD and reports directly to the Fire Chief and delegates. This position is also responsible for all public inquiries, emails, Records Management Systems, as well as completing Payroll, dealing with IT issues, and completing all financial reporting requirements.

This role is an extremely busy one and is heavily regulated by numerous pieces of legislation. However, it appears that an ambiguous reporting structure from the GFPID Board of Trustees does not use a clear Chain of Command, which has the net effect of compounding an already heavy workload in keeping up with the many day-to-day requirements within the duality of this role.

The incumbent Corporate Officer / Administrative Assistant currently filling this role is new (started approximately June 15, 2022) and has been working very hard to keep up with the various demands from the dual reporting structures, as well as the third aspect of inputs coming externally from members of the public. Most of the work time of this role has so far been dominated by having to deal with a relatively small number of repeat issues, including the appropriate handling of multiple Freedom of Information requests from members of the community. This has taken up most of the day-to-day time and accordingly, prevented this staff member from having adequate time to deal with other mounting issues and/or additional orientation and training time.

This position is following a job description document that is very broad but, in some respects, quite vague in its descriptions of both job accountabilities, scope, and conditions of employment. The incumbent was required to learn what had been done in the past by the former, long-term administrative assistant and navigate some outdated systems and/or practices that did not utilize existing systems to their fullest potential. She is very positive and feels some challenging processes are stabilizing and she remains committed to improving these. Having more training and mentorship, plus a plan or roadmap to follow in this role moving forward would be very helpful.

#### *Recommendations:*

*16. Fully develop and formalize the existing job description and scope for this position.*

- 17. Develop and clarify the reporting structure and Chain of Command for this position, to streamline and minimize multiple inputs from different sources imposing demands on time and workload.*
- 18. Provide additional training for this position, in various forms that cover the core aspects of the role.*
- 19. Potentially utilize an HR sub-contractor for immediate support on answering questions about issues; and can assist with longer term workload as required.*

### **4.3 Operational Guidelines**

Over the decades, the fire service has moved away from having strict Policies and Procedures, and Standard Operating Procedures, in favour of adopting Operational Guidelines (OG's). The use of the term "Guidelines" generally allows some flexibility in following operational procedures, when needed and as a situation requires on a case-by-case basis.

It is crucial that an agency or organization have a complete and comprehensive portfolio of Operational Guidelines, and that all personnel are familiar with them. Operational Guidelines not only provide agency personnel with the rules, policies, and procedures of the organization, but they do so while outlining themes of Leader's Intent for the organization and ensures legal compliance as there are certain policies required by law including Workplace Violence, Workplace Harassment, & Protection of Personal Information.

Management of the GVFD has identified the need to update existing Operational Guidelines and add new OG's for subjects not covered within the existing list. This work has been ongoing over the last two years, but the task is not a small one and will require additional resourcing to review and consult on best practices and the compliance of content. The choice to resource this task should also ensure that time is allotted internally for the work to be completed. Admirably, GVFD Command staff and their delegates continue to work as hard as possible to update and add new OG's, using what limited time is available within their day-to-day workloads.

#### *Recommendations:*

- 20. Focus on re-organizing and re-grouping OGs by subject, and additional OG's that will focus on the integration of GFPID authorities (Bylaws) as well as aspects of GVFD governance (see Appendix #7 p. 40).*
- 21. Ensure all GVFD Officers fully understand all OG's and are fully aware of updates; incorporate into administrative / training programs, for awareness of all personnel.*
- 22. Review and implement new and updated Operational Guidelines outlining policies, procedures and administrative documentation required to ensure administrative infrastructure is legally compliant with the BC Human Rights Code, BC Labour Relations Code, Employment Standards Act (BC), Workers Compensation Act (BC) and other applicable Federal and Provincial Law (see Appendix 6 for required and encouraged internal operational policies). These updates should include the following:*

- a. *Incorporate the declared service level for GVFD as outlined in the newly updated OFC Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards (Playbook) and related Policy.*
- b. *Fully incorporate the GVFD Occupational Health & Safety Program and policies.*
- c. *Audit and formalize employee file documentation, including the collection, retention, storage, and access of personal and confidential employee information (Job descriptions, employment agreements, signed policies, annual Driver's Abstracts, medical information, promotional or disciplinary information, exit interviews, etc.)*
- d. *Policy formalizing exit interviews and other items requiring use of independent external 3<sup>rd</sup> party.*
- e. *Policy formalizing performance reviews and internal GVFD Promotional Procedures*
- f. *Policy regarding discrimination, anti-nepotism, and internal reporting structure for relatives working together.*

#### **4.4 Occupational Health & Safety**

Issued under the authorities of the *Workers Compensation Act* (BC), the Occupational Health & Safety Regulations of WorkSafeBC contain legal requirements for Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) Programs that must be met by all workplaces under the inspectional jurisdiction of WorkSafeBC. These requirements are grouped into Core, General, and Industry Specific sections (*see "Reference Links" at end of report*).

The primary purpose of a well functioning general **health and safety policy** is to identify both organizational and individual requirements and responsibilities to provide a safe and healthy workplace for all personnel, and protect them from work-related risks to their health, safety, and well-being. Such policy should list the general responsibilities of employers and the other workplace parties and state the employer's commitment to protect employees' health and safety by providing safe working conditions and co-operating with workplace parties such as employees, supervisors, the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative to ensure a safe work environment. The policy must be signed by upper management.

Local authority employers and their respective fire department management staff need to be well versed in all aspects of compliance for these requirements, to provide the basis upon which to address and solve workplace health and safety problems. In doing so, the OH&S program should recognize the unique routine and emergency work environment of fire departments and address a myriad of circumstances covered by statutory authorities of the *Workers Compensation Act* and other applicable provincial and federal authorities.

The unfortunate reality of the work done by firefighters in the course of their duties is that regular exposure to a variety of hazards can never be eliminated completely, however, many of these risks can be reduced or minimized through proactive planning, preparation, training, and execution of foundational practices and procedures. From the initial response to the return and clean up after the call, there are requirements to outline safe work procedures for each step.

In addition to preparing a general health and safety policy, an employer that regularly employs more than five employees (threshold varies depending on jurisdiction) must also have a health and safety program in place to implement workplace policies and supporting procedures that address Joint OH&S Committees, WHMIS training, Workplace Violence, and Bullying and Harassment.

Fire departments also must ensure firefighter safety before, during, and after training events and responses to calls by developing and implementing hazard-specific policies and procedures addressing emergency preparedness and responses to calls. Accordingly, fire departments should have policies addressing all aspects of Supervision of workers, all training activities and programs that match their declared service level, and policies for safe operation of fire apparatus including safe backing procedures and the use of seatbelts while vehicles are in motion. Departments must also have policies addressing all safety issues while operating at fires and other emergency incidents, including hazardous environments. These should include topics such as exposure to carcinogens (cancer is now a leading cause of deaths in firefighters), annual Fit Testing and use of SCBA, decontamination and procedures for transportation and cleaning of turnout gear, as well as overall Supervision, Incident Command and accountability tracking of all resources operating at the scene.

Lastly, but also significantly, any department operating at a declared service level of “Interior”, or “Full Service”, must be aware of all risks inherent to operating in an Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH) hazardous environment and include policies and training on firefighter entrapment and self-rescue, calling a “Mayday” and the ensuing communication procedures, and Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) roles and responsibilities on the fireground. This must include firefighters and Officers, as each has a specific role to play in the event of firefighter entrapment and rescue in an IDLH environment (*see Reference link “F” p. 41 – WorkSafeBC OH&S sections and specifically Part 31 - Firefighting*).

*Recommendations:*

*23. As outlined in Recommendation 22(b), develop a more fulsome portfolio of Occupational Health & Safety Operational Guidelines that covers the wide spectrum of OH&S Program issues faced by fire departments.*

#### **4.5 RMS**

Various laws in British Columbia outline the statutory obligation for organizations to properly manage their records and sensitive information. Records management for fire departments is becoming more and more complicated, with increasing focus on safety, liability, and Due Diligence due to the nature of the role of fire departments in their communities. Effective documentation, secure retention of sensitive information, and proficiency with policies and procedures for handling this information are hallmarks of a good records management system. “If it is not documented, it wasn’t done.”

Examples include but are not limited to signed policies relating to training records, the handling of personal information of staff, and sensitive personal medical information or fire investigation information recorded in Officer’s reports after providing fire and/or rescue services.

GVFD uses the FirePro RMS system, and Management has acknowledged that their RMS processes can be improved by developing updated policies and taking advantage of available FirePro training credits to learn and incorporate aspects of the system that have not yet been fully utilized.

*Recommendations:*

*24. Review the capabilities of the current records management and email systems to streamline workflows, and potentially utilize an IT sub-contractor, to assist with upgrading and/or implementing an improve records management and email system.*

## 5. GVFD Operations

### 5.1 Organizational Structure

Our analysis shows that the GVFD Command staff are doing well in leading departmental operations, with many initiatives undertaken since taking over the department. A new fire hall, new apparatus and equipment, and updated training facilities provide a very good foundation for improved core response capabilities at the “Full Service” level. New programs have been started, such as the Day FF program, Exit Interview program for departing personnel; and \$406,000 in grant funding was secured by GVFD over a period of less than three years.

A very large amount of time, energy, and dedication is required from the very small group of Command staff to ensure oversight of the day-to-day efficacy of GVFD operations, training, and response capability is being done acceptably and in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and best practices. Often, some of these responsibilities are delegated to Operational Officers to increase Span of Control and assist with workload.

As noted previously, however, the Fire Chief is essentially alone in the role of Exempt Management of GVFD. Typically, a fire department should always have a 2<sup>nd</sup> In Command (2IC) so that the statutory responsibilities of the Fire Chief can be delegated when the Chief is away or otherwise unavailable. Having an additional Exempt staff position would increase administrative capacity and help the Fire Chief manage the considerable and statutory workload placed upon this position.

Without an additional Exempt Deputy Chief’s position, the GFPID and GVFD are accepting that more and more responsibilities and workload will continue to be downloaded to senior Operational Officers. This, in turn, may have a negative effect on recruitment and/or retention of these senior officers and therefore an overall negative effect on the retention of these experienced personnel.

#### Recommendations:

*25. As listed in Recommendation #15: Create and fund an additional GVFD Command staff position of Deputy Fire Chief.*

### 5.2 Staffing, Recruitment & Retention, and Remuneration

GVFD recruitment and retention seems to fluctuate normally, and like many volunteer fire departments currently, remuneration issues often lie at the root of any challenges attracting new members as well as retaining senior Officers. GVFD staffing averages approximately 36 firefighters, including Command staff, and a goal has been established to raise the staffing numbers to 40 and have it balanced by assigning equal numbers to the north and south halls, as per Fire Underwriters Survey analysis.

One primary issue identified in our research was specifically the increasing gap between rates of compensation to GVFD personnel for callouts and/or training when compared to wages that self-employed members (i.e., contractors) lose when leaving their work and responding to calls for service / training.

#### Recommendations:

*26. Consider ways to encourage new recruitment.*

*27. Consider options for an improved compensation model that increases remuneration / compensation of GVFD personnel.*

### **5.3 Hall Locations, Response Model & KPI's**

As a “Full Service” department, GVFD responds to a wide range of routine and emergency call categories from two firehalls strategically located at the north and south ends of the Island. These halls are located to optimize response coverage across 57 square kilometers with some challenging topography that potentially impacts response times of fire apparatus. This coverage appears to be working well for the GVFD.

Fire departments that develop performance measures can evaluate the level of services they provide while pursuing their goals and objectives. They analyze information on the impacts of their department’s efficiency and effectiveness. Measuring their performance over time will provide information to quantify their achievements as well as identify areas needing improvement. This performance data shows the actual results of fire departments’ actions and allows fire departments to demonstrate their real needs with verifiable data on workload, personnel, and other resources, which can be helpful in justifying budget requests, charting a direction for the department’s future, and suggesting changes in service.

Common Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) for fire services include statistics measuring total response times (including turnout time of crews responding to both medical and fire calls), annual number of incidents (listing all calls types in separate categories but especially fires), value of fire losses, fire injuries / deaths, and expenditures vs revenue (budget). In British Columbia, measurement of firefighter completions of training programs relevant to declared service levels, as well as completions of fire & life safety inspections, are also valuable KPI’s.

In 2022, the GVFD responded to a total of 554 calls for service (this number is recorded as 556 by Surrey Fire Regional Dispatch), the highest recorded call volume over the last 10 years and a 12.8% increase over the previous record high of 491 responses in 2017. By comparison, GVFD responded to 458 calls in 2021 and 352 calls in 2020 (*see Appendix #5, p.40 for the 10-year summary provided by GVFD Administration*).

Within this total number of calls for 2022, GVFD responded to 45 reports of a fire, 14 of which were confirmed structural fires. It is important to note that, for response purposes, all reports of fires are deemed to be “confirmed” fires until proven otherwise. The approximate average response time to these fires was approximately 5 to 7 minutes by the Duty Officer and just over 11 minutes for the first engine to arrive on scene. GVFD also responded to 304 medical calls in 2022, with an average response time of 12 minutes, 48 seconds (12:48). GVFD responded to 10 Motor Vehicle Incidents (MVI’s) for which the average response time 7 minutes, 34 seconds (7:34).

To adapt to the many serious operational challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, including the increased risk of exposures posed to responding firefighting personnel, Chief Sprogis wisely followed suit with most fire departments in BC and altered the GVFD response model. The “Platoon” shift system was created, to limit potential exposures amongst the GVFD members resulting in zero in-house transmissions amongst firefighters and lost no days of operations during the pandemic. The improved

organizational efficiency of this system was a strong benefit to the operations and response of GVFD, and it has therefore become the new normal for GVFD.

In addition, this altered response model allowed for firefighters to respond directly to an emergency call in their personal vehicles. This presents challenges to the corresponding incident command structure and the statutory occupational health & safety requirement to control and coordinate personnel arriving at fires.

*Recommendations:*

*28. The Fire Chief reverts the GVFD back to the normal response model of firefighters responding from the firehall on fire apparatus. The one exception to this recommendation is that GVFD maintain the amended response model for Command staff, to continue to have these crucial Incident Commanders respond from home so as to arrive on scene at a fire as quickly as possible.*

#### **5.4 Apparatus & Preventative Maintenance Program (PMP)**

GVFD continues to improve their firefighting response capabilities by adding new and updated replacement apparatus to their fleet. This includes new pumper / tanker apparatus (see FUS and Superior Tanker Shuttle Service section, below), a wildland bush truck, and a newly acquired quint (pumper with an aerial master stream) donated by a member of the community.

The aerial quint provides a new and unique firefighting function by allowing for a large GPM elevated master stream to attack fires in larger structures, or where increased reach of stream is a tactical advantage when fighting fires that are hard to reach.

A new, single axle engine with pump and roll capability is currently being developed for GVFD that will provide an enhanced role in protecting the community in the event of a wildland urban interface fire. In addition, the smaller wildland “brush” truck provides better access and egress to offroad wildfires than the larger, heavier apparatus that will often not be able to access.

Under the *Motor Vehicle Act (BC)*, regular truck checks are mandatory in British Columbia. These checks ensure the vehicle is safe to operate on a roadway. Regular checks of the braking, steering, engine, and pump mechanisms, as well as windshields, wheels and tires, emergency lighting and warning devices, and communications devices are all part of a regular checking protocol that is recorded and kept with the vehicle as well as in Administration. In addition, annual pump testing and non-destructive ladder testing should be completed by a certified technician.

This system of checks, and associated repairs and maintenance, is referred to as a Preventative Maintenance Program (PMP) and must be administered by licensed heavy-duty mechanics or Emergency Vehicle Technicians (EVT’s) either internal to the department, or by an external third-party service provider.

*Recommendations:*

*29. Continue goal of upgrades and consolidation of apparatus fleet that provides optimal water shuttle and pumping capacity from each firehall, as outlined in FUS analysis.*

*30. Formalize aerial quint training and operations program.*

*31. Maintain use of wildland Brush truck for access to difficult WUI fires.*

*32. Maintain use of external provider for preventative maintenance program and annual testing of pumps and ladders.*

## **5.5 Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS)**

Fire Underwriters Survey™ (FUS) is a national organization that provides data on public fire protection for fire insurance statistical work and underwriting purposes of subscribing insurance companies (see *Reference link “J” – Fire Underwriters Survey*).

To help establish appropriate fire insurance rates for residential and commercial properties, insurance companies need reliable, up-to-date information about a community's fire-protection services. Fire Underwriters Survey provides that information through the **Public Fire Protection Classification (PFPC)** and **Dwelling Protection Grades (DPG)** insurance grading systems.

The Public Fire Protection Classification (PFPC) is expressed on a 1 to 10 scale and primarily deals with commercial, industrial, institutional, and multi-family residential properties. The Dwelling Protection Grades (DPG) is a numerical system scaled from 1 to 5. This grading reflects the ability of a community to handle fires in small buildings (e.g. single family dwellings).

Communities across Canada are assessed and PFPC and DPG grades are calculated by Certified Fire Protection Specialists, Engineering Technologists and Professional Engineers. This information is then published in the online Fire Insurance Grading Index. When a community improves its PFPC or DPG, insurance rates may be reduced, and underwriting capacities may increase.

By classifying a communities' ability to suppress fires, Fire Underwriters Survey helps the communities evaluate their public fire protection services. The program provides an objective, national standard that helps fire departments in planning and budgeting for facilities, equipment, and training. With the objective of securing lower fire insurance premiums for communities with better public fire protection, the PFPC program provides incentives and rewards for communities that choose to improve their fire protection levels and thereby the community PFPC classification.

GVFD has previously received a FUS DPG grading of 3A, the highest grading available to a volunteer fire service organization.

## **5.6 FUS Superior Tanker Shuttle Service**

In areas without municipal-type fire hydrant water supplies, fire fighting presents a significantly greater challenge. Alternative water supplies include water supplies other than those that are defined as pressurized, municipal-type hydrant water supply systems. Gabriola Island fits this category.

A tanker shuttle operation refers to the capacity of fire apparatus that can move water from a source location to the fire ground via road infrastructure. **Accredited Superior Tanker Shuttle Service** is the highest of three rankings awarded by FUS. GVFD should be commended for achieving this highest ranking in 2019. This accreditation lasts until 2024, at which time GVFD should obtain re-accreditation by Fire Underwriters Survey (see *Appendix #1(b), p.40 – Superior Tankers Shuttle Accreditation*).

Recommendations:

33. *Continue collaboration with Fire Underwriters Survey to identify available resources to maintain Superior Tanker Shuttle Service Accreditation and optimal PFPC / DPG rating.*

## **5.7 Fire Prevention, Investigation, & Public Life Safety Education**

Fire prevention and public fire & life safety education are of paramount importance in any community in British Columbia. Today's homes burn faster than ever and modern synthetic furnishings and materials release heat and deadly toxins far more quickly (see Reference link "I", p. 41 – *Modern v Legacy Fire Room*). In a fire, seconds can mean the difference between a safe escape and a tragedy, and residents may have less than two minutes to safely escape a home fire from the time the smoke alarm sounds. The ability to get out of a home during a fire depends on early warning from smoke alarms as well as escape planning in advance.

GVFD has done a good job implementing public education programs at local schools. Fire safety education isn't just for school children, however, with the elderly also being a major demographic at risk in a fire. Residential home fires are the leading category of fires in British Columbia, making it important for children and adults alike to take some time to make sure they understand how to stay safe in case of a fire. As in being done in communities across Canada, GVFD firefighters provide lifesaving public education in an effort to decrease injuries and fatalities caused by fires. (See Appendix #8, p. 40 - *Office of the Fire Commissioner 2021 Annual Report*)

GVFD fire Prevention measures are functioning well, with a program of regular inspections of commercial properties in place.

## **5.8 Wildfire / WUI Protection**

Recently, extreme weather events experienced in British Columbia have challenged many local authorities and their fire services. These events have highlighted not only the importance of emergency preparedness, but also the importance of adequate response within communities and the crucial importance of effective communications.

Over the last two years, heat domes combined with a lack of precipitation have caused extreme wildfire risks in communities across BC. In cases such as the villages of Lytton and Monte Lake, this risk resulted in catastrophic fires that destroyed entire communities.

Under Bylaw # 95, GVFD fire control measures are in place to limit the size and type of activities in the community that may increase fire hazard and danger risks during high or extreme fire danger ratings issued by BC Wildfire Service. Although some debate in the community occurred during the summer of 2022 in respect to the nature and powers of GVFD fire permits, it is vitally important to remember that the overall priority of the GFPID Letters Patent is to ensure the fire safety of Gabriola Island. As such, the issuance and/or revocation of fire permits must always be subject to, and at the discretion of, the GVFD Fire Chief's statutory decision-making powers in considering new or updated information and is not reliant on the consensus of members of the community.

GVFD has incorporated many wildland urban interface (WUI) training and operational aspects provided by the BC Wildfire Service and Office of the Fire Commissioner, including Engine Boss, WS-115 Sprinkler

Ops, and WSPP-WFF. All GVFD firefighters are FireSmart trained, with nine members to LFR level. GVFD also has well-functioning FireSmart program measures for all residents of the Island, with over 100 FireSmart community inspections being completed last year. These programs are excellent value to the community and are especially relevant for Island communities who cannot rely on prompt mutual aid resources. FireSmart programs should therefore be continued as much as possible.

In terms of GVFD fire apparatus that help address the threat of wildfire, after recently completing the WS-115 Sprinkler Ops training, a GVFD Sprinkler Protection Unit (SPU) trailer is being developed that will be used proactively in times of wildfire threat by creating a moisture or humidity envelope around structures, thereby minimizing potential fire damage to the structures from fire embers spread by wind.

As well, a GVFD “brush” truck brings unique wildland capability response, and a single axle tender with pump and roll capability is currently being developed for GVFD. Both of these apparatus will provide an enhanced role in protecting the community in the event of a wildland urban interface fire.

*Recommendations:*

- 34. Revise Bylaw language to clarify and strengthen fire control criteria measures (and exemptions) by permitting, and Incorporate reference to the OFC Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner (LAFC's), as outlined in Sections 6, 7, and 24 of the Fire Services Act (BC)*
- 35. Continue FireSmart program activities on Island and liaise with RDN Emergency Program.*
- 36. Fund and increase fire prevention & life safety education programs in the community.*
- 37. Continue collaboration with BC Wildfire Service to identify available resources to maintain WUI fire response readiness, such as is being done with the WS-115 training and Sprinkler Protection Unit development.*

## **5.9 Emergency Program & Community Notifications**

Emergency Management refers to the actions taken to prepare communities to be less vulnerable and better able to respond to emergencies. An all-hazards approach is an integrated approach to emergency preparedness planning that focuses on capacities and capabilities that are critical for a full spectrum of emergencies, disasters, and catastrophic events.

Emergencies are managed first at the local level – for example, by first responders such as, fire departments, police, medical professionals, and local governments. The *Emergency Program Act* (BC) and the Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation establishes the responsibility of local authorities to develop emergency plans based on the hazards and vulnerabilities in their communities. For Gabriola Island, this role is shared with the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) and the Gabriola Recreation Society.

GVFD met the challenges presented by recent extreme weather events and has good involvement for the community by providing logistical support and developing new initiatives, such as the partnership with GERTIE bus group for community evacuations. GVFD also provides social media notifications to

residents via their website and Blog, to provide updated information on topics such as recent and current incidents, public participation and training events, and safety notices.

*Recommendations:*

- 38. Formalize the role and function of GVFD Emergency Program Coordinator to liaise with the RDN Emergency Program.*

## **5.10 Medical Response**

In British Columbia, the authority for pre-hospital emergency medical response, treatment, and transport of a patient is covered under the *Emergency Health Services Act* (BC) and specifically lies with the BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) under the direction of BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) and the Provincial Health Services Authority of BC. This mandate is empowered by a provincial response matrix through regionalized BCAS dispatch centers in BC.

As part of this response matrix, and with approval of the local authority, BCEHS and BCAS can utilize local authority fire departments to augment the BCAS response system and assist with providing first medical response and some basic interventions and/or treatments to patients. These responses are within pre-determined guidelines of training, licensure, and response criteria for participating fire departments.

For many communities, a local fire department response to a call for assistance is expected and can often be beneficial as the first arriving agency, depending on whether BCAS resources are immediately available or otherwise delayed in responding due to a variety of factors. Immediate triage, assessment, and primary interventions at the scene increase response efficiencies in that lifesaving interventions can be immediately attempted, while patient location, medical status, and any updates can be relayed to BCAS dispatch and responding units in a timely manner, to ensure the appropriate resources are directed to the call.

GVFD prioritizes medical responses in their community and works very hard at maintaining their first responder training and proficiency levels. Recently, the department has commenced training towards gaining Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) certification and licensure, to increase the level of care they are able to provide to their citizens when called upon by the BCEHS / BCAS resource response matrix. This enhanced training is facilitated by internal GVFD instructors as part of the GVFD annualized training calendar.

## **6. GVFD Training Programs**

### **6.1 Organizational Structure**

Overall, there is a legal duty placed upon employers and supervisors to ensure that their firefighters are adequately trained for any potential hazard they may encounter during their duties, and this duty extends to ensuring their firefighters are appropriately supervised while performing these duties. The GVFD Training Division has done an admirable job with their programs. Feedback received during our review identifies that Training Officer Captain Stringer and Fire Chief Sprogis are taking training seriously

and are doing a good job in providing this very important function. Not unlike many small volunteer fire departments across BC, the time and dedication required not only from the Command staff and Officers in leading training initiatives, but also from the firefighters themselves in participating in regular weekly training programs, is substantial and all are to be commended for their commitment in doing so.

Our discussion and analysis of the Training Division and discussion with Training Officer Stringer identifies the many statutory demands placed upon this division, particularly within a “part-time” schedule as the Training Officer position is currently funded. This part time model relies significantly on Suppression Officers and Specialized Instructors to assist with instruction and evaluation.

*Recommendations:*

*39. GVFD fund the position of GVFD Training Officer to “full-time” and provide additional resources (Delegate Staff, ancillary budget) to continue to provide certified training and evaluation, as well as complete record keeping management.*

*40. Consider adding Training (assistant) to a potential Deputy Fire Chief job description / portfolio.*

## **6.2 Office of the Fire Commissioner 2022 Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards**

Under paragraph 3(3)(b) of the *Fire Services Act* (BC), the Fire Commissioner must establish the minimum standards of training required for the fire services in British Columbia. In 2014, the “British Columbia Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards” (commonly known as the “Playbook”) was issued, replacing the previous provincial training standards made by Ministerial Order in 2003 that mandated the full National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) firefighter 1001 as the provincial standard.

In October of 2022, the Office of the Fire Commissioner released their updated Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards document. This document provides not only the latest cyclical updates to the NFPA standards, but it also brings increased clarity to governing policies and procedures held by Government through the Office of the Fire Commissioner, such as the service level being declared by the local authority and the associated training program. In addition, this document brings an increased focus on associated regulations within other provincial statutory authorities such as the Workers Compensation Act (BC) and the Motor Vehicle Act (BC) applicable to all firefighters in the province (see *Reference link A on p. 41 – Office of the Fire Commissioner Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards*).

Separately noted within this document are the 2004 amendments to Section 217.1 of the Criminal Code of Canada, resulting from the Westray Mines Bill (formerly known as Bill C-45) that established legal requirements for employers to ensure the workplace safety of their workers.

The Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards document more clearly outlines the importance of having a designated Risk Management function and increases the focus on the fiduciary responsibilities of the employer to have a well functioning Records Management System (RMS) to track and maintain training records for all firefighters’ training.

As noted within the document, the objective for the OFC Training Standards is to identify the competencies and skills that all structure firefighters must have to enhance their personal safety and

wellbeing while performing the functions of a firefighter for their community. The Training Standards identifies the minimum competencies necessary to perform many of the typical roles or functions required for fire departments to effectively provide structural fire suppression services to their community within their defined service levels. Based on National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards, each function in the competency ladder is listed with the requisite minimum firefighter training requirements that must be met to achieve proficiency (job performance requirement – JPR) at that given function.

### **6.3 Training Calendar & Training Matrix**

The Office of the Fire Commissioner Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards (formerly known as the Playbook) document, and the associated Policy, Procedure, and Annex suite of documents, outline clarified language regarding service level declarations by a local authority, and corresponding requirements for firefighter training programs.

GVFD is declared as a “Full Service” department, meaning that their structure firefighters are required to meet the full standards of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) as outlined in the “British Columbia Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards” 2022 version. In declaring “Full Service”, the GVFD faces ongoing challenges to maintain the training (and in turn, operational) requirements identified at the Full-Service level. This is especially true when considering the high benchmarks of the NFPA standards, and the maintenance of various JPR’s (Job Performance Requirements) contained within these standards as they are cyclically updated by NFPA on an ongoing basis. Currently, the GVFD training matrix utilizes one 3-hour evening training session per week, and no weekend sessions as some other volunteer departments commonly do. This once-weekly cycle is very tight and can leave gaps for some in the total completions of all training skills each year. In the event a firefighter misses a session, it is difficult to find time in an otherwise full training calendar for catch up of those that missed the training previously.

Working with VIERA as their accredited external fire training provider, many programs for internal GVFD Instructors and Evaluators, Suppression Officers, Incident Safety Officers, and front-line firefighters are being utilized to increase the amount of accredited GVFD personnel. Further, the Training Division has increased their capabilities to operate internal live fire training, along with firefighter survival and self rescue training, Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) training, and Emergency Scene Management (ESM) update training for Officers.

To meet statutory requirements under the purview of the *Fire Services Act* (BC) for reporting of fire occurrences, as well as improved fire prevention, control, and investigation training, the GVFD continues to utilize Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner (LAFC) and FIRES Reporting training from the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) for their Officers and Command staff. In addition, GVFD has sourced wildland urban interface (WUI) Engine Boss, WS-115 Sprinkler Ops, and WSPP-WFF training through the BC Wildfire Service, and all GVFD personnel have been FireSmart trained to increase wildfire preparedness and preventive planning / mitigation in the community through improved education and inspection programs.

GVFD continues to have a high focus on medical first responses in the community, to support the BC Ambulance Service (BCAS) in the provision of emergency medical care on the Island. GVFD personnel

trained and licensed to EMA-FR (First Responder) are increasing substantially, and the entire GVFD is qualified to provide Naloxone (Opioid antagonist) intervention for cases of opioid overdose. Gradually, GVFD is moving towards the enhanced EMR (Emergency Medical Responder) level for their firefighters, which will replace the First Responder program. Additional training for GVFD personnel in BCAS helicopter landing procedures and landing zone management has been completed, all of which is of benefit to the citizens of Gabriola requesting assistance in times of medical emergencies.

The Training Division has also increased their focus on fire apparatus training programs for drivers and pump operators. Safely driving to and from routine and emergency calls and being able to secure a water supply while pumping water for the extinguishment of fires are core priorities for training in all fire departments. GVFD has trained fourteen new Class 3 drivers and created a formal training program for their newly acquired quint (combination pumper and ladder truck with elevated master stream capability), generously donated to GVFD by a member of the community. GVFD Training has created a formal, in-house pump operator program as well as an Emergency Vehicle Operator (EVO) and standardized on-site driving course. These internal programs are a very heavy workload and are augmented by external training providers, as required.

Currently, all of this training focus is completed within a twelve-month (annualized) training calendar. Our discussion and analysis of the Training Division and discussion with Training Officer Stringer identifies the many demands placed upon this division, particularly within a “part-time” schedule as the Training Officer position is currently funded. Recruitment and training of new firefighters; new and ongoing monthly and annualized training programs; new skills training and ongoing maintenance training for front line firefighters; apparatus driving and pump operation training; and various speciality training demands such as First Responder (FR) or Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) as well as seasonal training requirements such as Wildland Urban Interface and FireSmart training increases regular reliance on Suppression Officers and Specialized Instructors to assist with instruction and evaluation for completion of these training programs.

*Recommendations:*

- 41. Expand the annualized training calendar from 12 to 24 months.*
- 42. Consider adding one weekend training day per month to the GVFD training calendar and adjust training matrix accordingly.*
- 43. Adjust weekly and monthly training plans to separate out “truck checks” from regular training and re-focus on small group skills development each week, building up to a monthly or quarterly large-scale scenario that incorporates the skills learned and practiced over the previous weeks.*
- 44. Better balance of groups during training sessions – don’t separate / segregate groups as much. Allowing a mix of seniorities and skills allows for senior members to assist training of newer members.*
- 45. Consider greater utilization of online technical training programs (i.e. UL/FSRI fire behaviour series) that firefighters can complete while at home, to augment existing training programs.*

- 46. Implement all aspects of firefighter survival and self-rescue, calling a Mayday, and RIT training programs for all firefighters and Officers.*
- 47. Continue with implementation of ongoing ESM technical update and refresher training program for all Officers, including Mayday training and RIT activation drills for IC.*
- 48. Avoid using the term “Exterior” to describe minimally trained firefighters not yet considered “front line”, as the declared service level is “Full Service” and not “Exterior”. Instead, use terms like “Probationary” or “recruit” to describe firefighters still in training towards their full NFPA 1001 level 1 and 2 certifications.*
- 49. Once it is made available for fire departments in BC, utilize OFC Exterior and Interior level training curriculum for specific JPR’s for each skill to fully develop library of training Lesson Plans for use by all Training and Officers staff.*

## **6.4 RMS**

All fire departments in British Columbia are legally required to document all training that is provided to each member of their department, whether learning a new skill for the first time, or practicing these skills within an ongoing proficiency maintenance basis.

From new recruits to Chief Officers, accurate individual training records are of paramount significance for Training Officers when determining a daily, monthly, or annualized training calendar, so they can best ensure that all members have received the training necessary with which to demonstrate competency in each skill required of them in the course of their duties. Firefighters that have missed training on a certain skill need to be scheduled to receive any training they have missed, as best as practicable.

GVFD utilizes a Training Officer position that is augmented by Suppression Officers and Specialized Instructors. Daily or weekly training sessions and drills can be documented by either the Officers or the Training Officer specifically, and records of this training are currently either paper-based or electronically tracked.

All records should include the date and name of each member being trained, which skill(s) is being instructed and by whom, the duration of the training session and if applicable, whether the competency was demonstrated acceptably. A modern Records Management System (RMS) designed for use by first responder agencies is key for maintaining and tracking these crucial records.

### *Recommendations:*

- 50. Improve and simplify daily / weekly training reports used by Officers for training of their crews, and ensure these reports are captured within the overall GVFD RMS.*
- 51. Improve and simplify training records management system using existing FirePro system and take advantage of enhanced RMS capabilities in conjunction with available FirePro training credits for Administrative Assistant, Training Officer, Suppression Officers, and Specialized Instructors.*

## 7. Budget

Fiscal constraints and challenges are not uncommon in fire departments across British Columbia and indeed Canada. Increasingly, fire departments are required by their local authorities to “do more with less” as public funding provided by taxation of residents is often limited and can often face competing priorities for the provision of other municipal services and not just that of fire protection.

However, this has increasingly been proven to be false economy and dangerous practice due to the nature of modern firefighting and an increased focus on a variety of applicable regulations, standards, and law within the context of due diligence and liability.

Due to the synthetic materials used in modern furnishings and building materials, modern fires burn much hotter and faster than legacy fires of decades past and release lethal concentrations of toxins far more quickly. This, in turn, greatly increases fire safety risk to residents and requires immediate escape to increase chances of survival. Modern fires require the prompt arrival of adequate fire department resources, to contain and extinguish the fire as quickly as possible. Failure to do so can allow the fire to exponentially grow, ultimately requiring far more resources to control and extinguish. *(See Reference Link “I” on p.41 – Modern vs Legacy Fire Room Comparison UL / FSRI)*

Up to date equipment combined with adequate staffing levels, compliant training programs, communications systems, occupational health & safety practices, and adherence to best practices standards makes managing modern day fire departments extremely complex. Doing so with limited budgets makes this even more challenging.

GVFD Command staff, Administration, Training, and Operations Officers are providing attentive management to the department, all of which has been accomplished while operating within a total base budget of \$751,880 in 2022. For comparative budgeting measure, an analysis has been undertaken of the total assessed valuation of commercial and residential properties protected by the GVFD (estimated at \$3.2 Billion in 2022) versus the annualized GVFD budget of \$751,880 (2022).

GVFD Management should be commended in their innovation by securing \$406,000 in Provincial grants over a period of less than three years (2019-2022), to augment low baseline annual budgets. Continuing this process to leverage available grant funding should remain a GVFD priority.

### Recommendation:

*52. Moving forward, the GFPIID Trustees should consider increasing the funding allocated to the GVFD to be able to improve administrative and training resourcing, improve options for remuneration of GVFD firefighters, and implement various recommendations contained within this report.*

## 8. Long Range Strategic Planning

Strategic Planning is a basic and essential tool of any community or organization, with which to ensure definition of their vision, objectives, and goals and the timelines, sequencing, and measurements with which to achieve them. Typically, Strategic Plans are not annualized workplans but instead identify medium to long term timeframes such as three-, five-, and ten-year progressions.

The GFID Board of Trustees has created a select committee to address issues included in long range strategic planning (referred to as the Long-Range Planning Committee). The previous Long-Range Plan was a comprehensive report done in 1999 by Albert J. Reed, and links Gabriola Island infrastructure with GVFD Operations and other governance structures such as the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) and the Island's Trust Local Trust Committee Official Community Plan (OCP).

With relatively new Management in place at GVFD, as well as the cyclical timelines for Trustees due to election cycles, a new long-range Strategic Plan should be developed.

### Recommendation:

*53. Develop and implement a new long-range Strategic Plan that incorporates three-, five-, and ten-year benchmarks for goals and outcomes. This new plan should incorporate updated information, standards, statistics, and best practices.*

## 9. Conclusion

Overall, our impression is that the GVFD is not unlike many other small-sized volunteer fire departments across British Columbia and indeed, across Canada. A very large amount of time, energy, and dedication is required from the relatively small group of Command and Administrative staff, as well as Operational Officers, to ensure that the day-to-day efficacy of GVFD operations and response capability is being done in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and best practices. These personnel should be commended in doing so.

GVFD Management and Administration staff are doing as well as they can in providing attentive and innovative management to the department. It is important to note that this is being done within an environment of change management – previous management of the GVFD was held by a long-term Chief and Administrative staff that utilized different methods and held different relationships within the community. Since 2019, new management at GVFD has used external resources such as the Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) "Fire Department Inspection and Audit Checklist" as well as utilized the advice of OFC Fire Service Advisors (FSA's), Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS), Vancouver Island Emergency Response Academy (VIERA), BC Wildfire Service (BCWS), and the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). GVFD has incorporated new and updated methodologies and fosters new and existing relationships within the community they serve.

This report provides a high-level review to analyze and confirm that various aspects of GVFD administration / HR, operations, and training systems operate within statutory compliance and recognized best practices for fire services in BC. The Project Manager of GVFD (Chief Sprogis) is

responsible for all final decisions and for the implementation of any suggested amendments or changes to any framework, policies, or initiatives.

Specifically, this report provides policy advice and reports findings from research and analysis to develop and recommend any necessary changes to the GVFD regulatory framework, including policies, programs, and initiatives the Board should embrace as a governance model that empowers their employees and allows them the independence to perform their roles and duties as required. It is also our observation and opinion that these efforts and approaches need to be accepted by all GFPID trustees and supported by the Board collectively as the Employer, in terms of providing additional resourcing (staff, training, and budget) and a more collaborative and supportive work environment by following an improved and more clearly identified Chain of Command between the Board of Trustees and the Command Staff of GVFD. We therefore provide our recommendations for improvement, summarized below, and that GVFD engage external consultants to assist in areas where internal staff expertise is lacking or is otherwise in need of support.

## 10. Summary of Recommendations

**Issues Identification & Analysis** - Gabriola Fire Protection Improvement District (GFPID) Board of Trustees Governance model and Policies relating to regulation and provision of Gabriola Island Volunteer Fire Department services:

Authority Having Jurisdiction: Fire Services Act (BC); Local Government Act (BC) & Improvement District Authorities

Authority Having Jurisdiction: GFPID Authorities

Other Authorities

Corporate Governance & Workflow Processes

Recommendation:

- 1. The GFPID Board of Trustees and GVFD Fire Management should develop and adopt an improved and clarified Chain of Command between the Board Chair and the GVFD Fire Chief that provides for a transparent and good faith process supported by streamlined and minimized bidirectional, independent contacts between Board members and GVFD staff.*

Fire Bylaws

Bylaw #95 (Fire Regulations Bylaw - June 2020):

Recommendations:

- 2. Improve clarity of powers of the Fire Chief in GFPID Bylaws by incorporating some if not all the statements contained in the Part 9 Division 2 sections of the [Local Government Act \(BC\)](#) related to Special Fire Protection powers (Section 303, 1, a-d) into these Bylaws. Improvement Districts*

*do automatically use the statements of Part 9 Div. 2 related to Special Fire Protection powers so as the Object of GFPID is for the provision of fire protection, we believe that it would be useful and well within GFPID powers to incorporate this clarifying language.*

- 3. Incorporate reference to Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner, as outlined in Sections 6, 7, and 24 of the [Fire Services Act \(BC\)](#). Currently, the LAFC is referenced singularly as being the Fire Chief, and only in provision #10 of Bylaw #98.*
- 4. Incorporate reference to specific clauses from the [BC Wildfire Act](#) and associated Regulations regarding burning regulation and restriction.*

**Bylaw #98 (Fire Department Establishment and Operation Bylaw – September 2021):**

**Recommendations:**

- 5. As stated in Recommendation #2, improve clarity of powers of the Fire Chief in GFPID Bylaws by incorporating some if not all the statements contained in the Part 9 Division 2 sections of the [Local Government Act \(BC\)](#) related to Special Fire Protection powers (Section 303, 1, a-d) into these Bylaws. Improvement Districts do automatically use the statements of Part 9 Div. 2 related to Special Fire Protection powers so as the Object of GFPID is for the provision of fire protection, we believe that it would be useful and well within GFPID powers to incorporate this clarifying language.*
- 6. As stated in Recommendation #3, incorporate reference to Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner, as outlined in Sections 6, 7, and 24 of the [Fire Services Act \(BC\)](#). Currently, the LAFC is referenced singularly as being the Fire Chief, and only in provision #10 of Bylaw #98.*
- 7. Include reference in Bylaw to new “Authorities” section of GVFD Operational Guidelines that links Bylaws and authorities stemming from the BC Human Rights Code, BC Labour Relations Code, Employment Standards Act (BC) and the Workers Compensation Act (BC) to updated GVFD Operational Guidelines as they relate to provisions for workers (employees) in the workplace, where applicable.*
- 8. Improve clarity of the authorities of the Fire Chief (as this position reports within the governance model of the Board of Trustees) by implementing language that more clearly delineates these roles and responsibilities and a clear reporting structure within an updated, bi-directional Chain of Command.*
- 9. Create and embed a new Organizational Chart into this Bylaw.*
- 10. Remove references to hiring responsibilities and disciplinary appeal processes from this Bylaw and instead create new Operational Guidelines that identify clear processes for recruitment, promotional procedure, progressive discipline and termination, and other subjects covered under statutory law. As it currently stands, Bylaw #98 undermines the authority of the Fire Chief, and*

*the process of appeal increases legal liability to the Board. As it relates to this process, we recommend:*

- The roles and responsibilities that the Fire Chief and the Authority Having Jurisdiction (the Board of Trustees is the Employer) will play in this process be clarified.*
- Identify how the point of escalation is beyond the Fire Chief for employees (either a single member of the Board of Trustees or a 3rd party HR resource).*
- The Fire Chief be required to seek Board counsel prior to all terminations instead of the current appeal process and any uncertainty of the decision resolved prior.*
- An HR resource should be utilized ahead of all termination decisions to reduce legal liability.*

Declared Service Levels, Corresponding Training Programs & Operational Capabilities [per Office of the Fire Commissioner (OFC) Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards 2022]

Recommendations:

- 11. Formally identify the service level (Full Service) and incorporate into Bylaw (and reflect in Operational Guideline) that establishes GVFD's authority and anticipated operational capability.*
- 12. Ensure GVFD Training Programs reflect the declared service level and are identified in associated Operational Guidelines.*
- 13. Formally incorporate the Risk Management Function into Bylaw #98 and associated Operational Guidelines.*

## **GVFD Administrative Structure, Policies, Procedures, & Operational Guidelines**

### **Fire Chief**

Recommendations:

- 14. Establish and follow a clear, bi-directional, and well supported reporting structure (Chain of Command) between GFPID Board Chair and GVFD Fire Chief.*
- 15. Create and fund an additional GVFD Command staff position of Deputy Fire Chief.*

### **GFPID Corporate Officer**

Recommendations:

- 16. Fully develop and formalize the existing job description and scope for this position.*
- 17. Develop and clarify the reporting structure and Chain of Command for this position, to streamline and minimize multiple inputs from different sources imposing demands on time and workload.*
- 18. Provide additional training for this position, in various forms that cover the core aspects of the role.*

- 19. Potentially utilize an HR sub-contractor for immediate support on answering questions about issues; and can assist with longer term workload as required.*

## Operational Guidelines

### Recommendations:

- 20. Focus on re-organizing and re-grouping OGs by subject, and additional OG's that will focus on the integration of GFPID authorities (Bylaws) as well as aspects of GVFD governance.*
- 21. Ensure all GVFD Officers fully understand all OG's and are fully aware of updates; incorporate into administrative / training programs, for awareness of all personnel.*
- 22. Review and implement new and updated Operational Guidelines outlining policies, procedures and administrative documentation required to ensure administrative infrastructure is legally compliant with the BC Human Rights Code, BC Labour Relations Code, Employment Standards Act (BC), Workers Compensation Act (BC) and other applicable Federal and Provincial Law (see Appendix 6 for required and encouraged internal operational policies). These updates should include the following:*
- a. Incorporate the declared service level for GVFD as outlined in the newly updated OFC Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards (Playbook) and related Policy.*
  - b. Fully incorporate the GVFD Occupational Health & Safety Program and policies.*
  - c. Audit and formalize employee file documentation, including the collection, retention, storage, and access of personal and confidential employee information (Job descriptions, employment agreements, signed policies, annual Driver's Abstracts, medical information, promotional or disciplinary information, exit interviews, etc.)*
  - d. Policy formalizing exit interviews and other items requiring use of independent external 3<sup>rd</sup> party.*
  - e. Policy formalizing performance reviews and internal GVFD Promotional Procedures*
  - f. Policy regarding discrimination, anti-nepotism, and internal reporting structure for relatives working together.*

## Occupational Health & Safety

### Recommendations:

- 23. As outlined in Recommendation 22(b), develop a more fulsome portfolio of Occupational Health & Safety Operational Guidelines that covers the wide spectrum of OH&S Program issues faced by fire departments.*

## RMS

### Recommendations:

- 24. Review the capabilities of the current records management and email systems to streamline workflows, and potentially utilize an IT sub-contractor, to assist with upgrading and/or implementing an improve records management and email system.*

## **GVFD Operations**

### **Organizational Structure**

#### Recommendations:

- 25. As listed in Recommendation #15: Create and fund an additional GVFD Command staff position of Deputy Fire Chief.*

### **Staffing, Recruitment, Retention, & Remuneration**

#### Recommendations:

- 26. Consider ways to encourage new recruitment.*
- 27. Consider options for an improved compensation model that increases remuneration / compensation of GVFD personnel.*

### **Hall Locations, Response Model & KPI's**

#### Recommendations:

- 28. The Fire Chief reverts the GVFD back to the normal response model of firefighters responding from the firehall on fire apparatus. The one exception to this recommendation is that GVFD maintain the amended response model for Command staff, to continue to have these crucial Incident Commanders respond from home so as to arrive on scene at a fire as quickly as possible.*

### **Apparatus & Preventative Maintenance Program (PMP)**

#### Recommendations:

- 29. Continue goal of upgrades and consolidation of apparatus fleet that provides optimal water shuttle and pumping capacity from each firehall, as outlined in FUS analysis.*
- 30. Formalize aerial quint training and operations program.*
- 31. Maintain use of wildland Brush truck for access to difficult WUI fires.*
- 32. Maintain use of external provider for preventative maintenance program and annual testing of pumps and ladders.*

### **Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS)**

#### Recommendations:

- 33. Continue collaboration with Fire Underwriters Survey to identify available resources to maintain Superior Tanker Shuttle Service Accreditation and optimal PFPC / DPG rating.*

## Fire Prevention, Investigation, & Public Life Safety Education

### Wildfire / WUI Protection

#### Recommendations:

34. *Revise Bylaw language to clarify and strengthen fire control criteria measures (and exemptions) by permitting and incorporate reference to the OFC Local Assistants to the Fire Commissioner (LAFCS), as outlined in Sections 6, 7, and 24 of the Fire Services Act (BC).*
35. *Continue FireSmart program activities on Island and liaise with RDN Emergency Program.*
36. *Fund and increase fire prevention & life safety education programs in the community.*
37. *Continue collaboration with BC Wildfire Service to identify available resources to maintain WUI fire response readiness.*

### Emergency Program & Community Notifications

#### Recommendations:

38. *Formalize the role and function of GVFD Emergency Program Coordinator to liaise with the RDN Emergency Program.*

### Medical Response

### **GVFD Training Programs**

### Organizational Structure

#### Recommendations:

39. *GVFD fund the position of GVFD Training Officer to “full-time” and provide additional resources (Delegate Staff, ancillary budget) to continue to provide certified training and evaluation, as well as complete record keeping management.*
40. *Consider adding Training (assistant) to a potential Deputy Fire Chief job description / portfolio.*

### Office of the Fire Commissioner 2022 Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards

### Training Calendar & Training Matrix

#### Recommendations:

41. *Expand the annualized training calendar from 12 to 24 months.*
42. *Consider adding one weekend training day per month to the GVFD training calendar and adjust training matrix accordingly.*

43. *Adjust weekly and monthly training plans to separate out “truck checks” from regular training and re-focus on small group skills development each week, building up to a monthly or quarterly large-scale scenario that incorporates the skills learned and practiced over the previous weeks.*
44. *Better balance of groups during training sessions – don’t separate / segregate groups as much. Allowing a mix of seniorities and skills allows for senior members to assist training of newer members.*
45. *Consider greater utilization of online technical training programs (i.e. UL/FSRI fire behaviour series) that firefighters can complete while at home, to augment existing training programs.*
46. *Implement all aspects of firefighter survival and self-rescue, calling a Mayday, and RIT training programs for all firefighters and Officers.*
47. *Continue with implementation of ongoing ESM technical update and refresher training program for all Officers, including Mayday training and RIT activation drills for IC.*
48. *Avoid using the term “Exterior” to describe minimally trained firefighters not yet considered “front line”, as the declared service level is “Full Service” and not “Exterior”. Instead, use terms like “Probationary” or “recruit” to describe firefighters still in training towards their full NFPA 1001 level 1 and 2 certifications.*
49. *Once it is made available for fire departments in BC, utilize OFC Exterior and Interior level training curriculum for specific JPR’s for each skill to fully develop library of training Lesson Plans for use by all Training and Officers staff.*

## **RMS**

### Recommendations:

50. *Improve and simplify daily / weekly training reports used by Officers for training of their crews, and ensure these reports are captured within the overall GVFD RMS.*
51. *Improve and simplify training records management system using existing FirePro system and take advantage of enhanced RMS capabilities in conjunction with available FirePro training credits for Administrative Assistant, Training Officer, Suppression Officers, and Specialized Instructors.*

## **Budget**

### Recommendation:

52. *Moving forward, the GFPID Trustees should consider increasing the funding allocated to the GVFD to be able to improve administrative and training resourcing, improve options for remuneration of GVFD firefighters, and implement various recommendations contained within this report.*

## Long Range Strategic Planning

### Recommendation:

53. *Develop and implement a new long-range Strategic Plan that incorporates three-, five-, and ten-year benchmarks for goals and outcomes. This new plan should incorporate updated information, standards, statistics, and best practices.*

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## **11. Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS):**

#### **1a: Alternative Water Supplies for Public Fire Protection**

[Appendix 1a: FUS Alternative Water Supplies for Public Fire Protection](#)

#### **1b: Superior Tanker Shuttle Service Accreditation**

[Appendix 1b: FUS 2019 Superior Tanker Shuttle Accreditation Certificates](#)

### **Appendix 2: Office of the Fire Commissioner Fire Department Audit and Inspection Checklist:**

[Appendix 2: OFC FD Audit and Inspection Checklist](#)

### **Appendix 3: GFPID / GVFD Long Range Plan 1999**

[Appendix 3: GFPID GVFD Long Range Plan 1999](#)

### **Appendix 4: Surrey Fire Regional Dispatch Centre – Gabriola Island Annual Report 2022**

[Appendix 4: Surrey Fire Regional Dispatch Centre - GVFD Annual Report 2022](#)

### **Appendix 5: GVFD 10 Year Summary Incident Totals**

[Appendix 5: GVFD 10 year summary Incident Totals](#)

### **Appendix 6: HR Policy Recommendations**

[Appendix 6: HR Policy Recommendations - 2023](#)

### **Appendix 7: Sample Operational Guidelines Categorization and Reference to Governing Bylaw**

[Appendix 7: Operational Guidelines - Sample Table of Contents and OG Policy related to Fire & Emergency Bylaw](#)

### **Appendix 8: Office of the Fire Commissioner 2021 Annual Report**

[Appendix 8: Office of the Fire Commissioner 2021 Annual Report](#)

## 12. Reference Links:

- A. **Office of the Fire Commissioner Structure Firefighter Minimum Training Standards** and associated Policy, Procedure, and Annex suite of documents:  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management/fire-safety/training/firefighter-training>
- B. **Fire Services Act (BC):**  
[https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96144\\_01](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96144_01)
- C. **Local Government Act (BC):**  
[https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/r15001\\_00](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/r15001_00)
- D. **Wildfire Act (BC)** - Part 2 (refer to sections 10-12 inclusive for fire control / restriction / prevention measures)  
[https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/04031\\_01#part2](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/04031_01#part2)
- Regulations stemming from Wildfire Act – “**Wildfire Regulation**”:  
[https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/38\\_2005](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/38_2005)
- E. **Emergency Program Act (BC):**  
[https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96111\\_01](https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96111_01)
- F. **WorkSafeBC OHS sections:**  
Part 2 Division 4 – General Duties of Employers, Workers, and Others:  
<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/law-policy/occupational-health-safety/searchable-ohs-regulation/workers-compensation-act/part-2-occupational-health-and-safety#SectionNumber:Part2Div4Sec21>
- and Part 31 (**Firefighting**):  
<https://www.worksafebc.com/en/law-policy/occupational-health-safety/searchable-ohs-regulation/ohs-regulation/part-31-firefighting>
- G. **National Fire Protection Association (NFPA):**  
<https://www.nfpa.org/About-NFPA/NFPA-overview>  
<https://www.nfpa.org/About-NFPA/NFPA-Fire-Life-Safety-Policy-Institute>
- H. **Gabriola Island Volunteer Fire Department:**  
<https://www.gabriolafire.ca/links>
- I. **Modern vs Legacy Fire Room: UL FSRI Home Furnishings Comparison (Natural vs. Synthetic)**  
<https://youtu.be/87hAnxuh1g8>
- J. **Fire Underwriters Survey (FUS):** <https://fireunderwriters.ca/index.html>